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A LETTER
ON THE
STATE OF THE WAR.

BY ONE RECENTLY RETURNED FROM THE ENEMY'S COUNTRY.

I was released from a Yankee prison in August of last year, and for four months thereafter resided in the North on a parole of honour, awaiting my exchange. When I came out of prison, I found that everywhere the thought of the North was peace; not so much in the newspapers, whose office, especially with the Yankees, is rather to disguise public sentiment, than to express or apply it; but in every circle of conversation, and every quarter where men dared to unmask their minds and to substitute their true convictions for the stereotypes of affectation, I found a real desire for peace, which had almost ripened into a popular demand, ready to define its terms and resolved to insist upon its concession. I can recollect how I then burned to be in Richmond, to proclaim my convictions and to open my budget of assurances; how that the Chicago Convention meant peace; how that this and that man, least suspected of generosity to the Confederacy or of deference to truth, privately confessed the war to be a failure; how that even Republicans of Mr. Lincoln's school, seizing upon certain amiable expressions in the Confederate Congress of last summer, wanted to know if they might not mean some accommodation of the questions of the war, and replied to them with those affectations of generosity with which the dexterous cowardice of the Yankee is always ready to cover his sense of defeat.

This disposition of the public mind in the North—then a great surprise to me—was easily accounted for, when it was closely observed. It was clearly not the fruit of any decisive disasters to the Northern arms in the Summer campaign of 1864. But that campaign, up to the time in which I date my first observations in the North, had been negative. Atlanta had not fallen. All

the engagements in Northern Georgia had not amounted, as Johnston said, to the sum of more than one battle, and it was yet doubtful on which side to strike the average of success. Richmond was erect and defiant; and Lee's army had given new and conspicuous proofs of fortitude, at Cold Harbour and at Petersburg. Nowhere, as yet, could the enemy find any prospect of the speedy termination of the war; and though he had searched every link of the armour of the Confederacy, he had been unable to plant anywhere a serious wound. It is true, that so far in the campaign, the enemy's fortune had not been superiour to ours. But it was simply because it was thus negative; simply in prospect of a prolongation of the war that, in mid-summer of 1864, the Yankee public halted in its opinions and seriously meditated a proposition of peace.

The great lesson which the South is to learn of public opinion in the North is this: that the prospect of a long war is quite as sure to obtain the success and independence of the Confederacy, as the positive victories of her arms. It might not have been so in the first periods of the war, when the resolution of the enemy was fresh and patient, and the Union was then really the apple of his eye. But it is when patience has been worn threadbare by promises; when expectation has stood on tip-toe until it has ached; when the sentiment of Union has lost all its original inspiration; when "the Union as it was" has become more and more impossible to the hopes of the intelligent, and the attempt to realize it has fallen from the resolution of a sovereign necessity to a mere preference of alternatives, that we find the enemy quite as likely to be defeated by the prospect of a prolonged war, as by the dint of positive disaster, and, in fact, meditating more anxiously the question of Southern endurance, than the immediate fortunes of any military campaign.

It is a great mistake to suppose that in these later years of the war, the North is fighting for the Union as the *sine qua non*, the indispensable thing. That may be the clack of Yankee newspapers and the drone of demagogues. But I am convinced to the contrary. It is to be admitted that the North, in the development of her resources in this war, and the discovery cotemporary with it of an almost fabulous wealth in her oil regions and mines, and new fields of enterprise opened along the entire slope of the Rocky Mountains, has obtained a confidence which has assured her, among other things, that, even apart from the South, she has in herself the elements of a great national existence. It is this swollen wealth—some of it the wind-falls of a mysterious Providence—which has appeased much of that avarice which formed so large a share in the Northern desire for the Union. Again, as the war has progressed, it has be-

come more and more obvious—I may say irresistibly apparent—to countless intelligent persons in the North, that it has wasted what is most desirable in the Union; destroyed its *esprit*; left nothing to be recovered but its shadow, and that along with such paltry recovery of a mere name, must be taken the consequences of such despotic government as will be necessary to hold two hostile countries under a common rule. It is thus that the sentiment of the Union has lost much of its power in the North. The first fervours of the war are scarcely now to be discovered among a people who have chosen to carry on hostilities by the mercenary hands of foreigners and negroes, and have devised a system of substitution—a vicarious warfare—to an extent that is absolutely without parallel in the history of any modern nation.

All persons in the North, with the exception of some hundreds, tell you they prefer the Union; it is a universal desire spoken everywhere; but spoken only as a preference and desire, and no longer as a passion that insists upon an object which it considers death and ruin to dispense with. Of all who declare for the Union, but few will testify sincerely that they are for it at all hazards and consequences. Whatever may be the convenient language or the fulsome protestation of public opinion in the North, I am persuaded of two things:

First, that the North will not insist upon the Union in plain prospect of a war indefinitely prolonged.

And second, that the North will never fight the war beyond that moderate point of success on the part of the South, where she would be disposed to accommodate the enemy with certain treaty favours which might stand in lieu of the old Union, and where she would not be quite confident enough in her position to insist upon a severe independence.

It is thus that the war, on the part of the North, is limited by contingencies, which are very far short of decisive results one way or the other, and which may transpire even without any very signal successes of our arms.

What I have said of the peace movement in the North in the summer of 1864, before the fall of Atlanta, has its application to other times. That movement was simply the result of a conviction, not that the South was about to accomplish a positive triumph, but that she was able to endure the war much longer than had been expected, and yet had not reached that point of confidence where she would not be likely to make valuable concessions to the North for the early and graceful acknowledgment of her independence. That acknowledgment the North was then on the eve of making under certain disgraces, it is true, of party convenience, but none the less certainly because it

sought decent excuse for the act. The Democratic party was then well-nigh a unit on the subject of peace. "Burn my letter," wrote a distinguished politician of New England to me; "but when you get to Richmond, hasten to President Davis, and tell him the Chicago Convention means peace, and nothing but peace." It was the military events which followed that interrupted this resolution, and showed how little there was of principle or of virtuous intention in Yankee parties; and with the fall of Atlanta, Savannah, Wilmington and Charleston, and Sherman's campaign of magnificent distances, the Northern mind has again become inflamed with the fever of new hopes, and clamors for unconditional war, when it thinks that it is in the last stages of success.

The grand conclusion to which the observations I made in the North last summer lead is this: that if we can ever regain substantially nothing more than the *status quo* of seven months ago; if we can ever present to the North the same prospect of a long war we did then, and put before them the weary task of overcoming the fortitude of a brave people, we shall have peace and independence in our grasp. It is a vulgar mistake that to accomplish our success in this war we have to retrieve all of the past and recover by arms all the separate pieces of our territory. It is to be remembered that we are fighting on the defensive, and have only to convince the enemy that we are able to protect the vital points of our country to compel him to a peace in which all is surrendered that he has overrun, and all the country that he holds by the ephemeral and worthless title of invasion, falls from him as by the law of gravitation. The price of our peace has come to be now but a moderate measure of endeavour—a measure I am persuaded only large enough to convince the Yankee of another link drawn out in the prolongation of the war. Let but his present animated hope of dispatching the Confederacy in a few months be exploded, and I predict that peace will be the result; for he will have then an occasion of discouragement far greater than that of last summer, as each later prolongation of the war will bring with it a larger tax on patience and a new train of necessities—among them the dreaded one of *conscription*, no longer to be put off by the present comfortable expedients which have reached their *maximum* in the substitution of the foreigner and the negro.

My friends, it is not extravagant to say that the time has come when only such endeavour as will put us in anything like the situation we were a few months ago—or only such proof of endurance as will convince the North of another lease of the war—will assure us peace and independence. I wish that I could insert this conviction in every fibre of the Southern mind. The task be

fore us is not very great. If we can only regain the situation of last summer, or even if we can only give a proof to the enemy that we are not at the extremity of our resources or at the last limits of resolution—that we are able and determined to fight this war indefinitely, we have accomplished the important and vital conditions of peace. And I believe we can easily do the first—recover substantially, in all important respects, the losses of the past few months, and even add to the *status quo* of last summer new elements of advantage for us. Defeat Sherman at any stage short of Richmond and it re-opens and recovers all the country he has overrun. Leave him if you please the possession of the sea-ports; but these have no value to us as ports of entry and are but picket posts in our system of defences. His campaign comes to nought if he cannot reach Grant; nothing left of it but the brilliant zig-zag of a raid, vanishing as heat lightning in the skies. Follow the consequences of Sherman's misadventure. Grant's army of mongrels alone, without the looked for aid from the Carolinas, can no more take Richmond than it can surmount the sky. If that army is the only assailant of Richmond, then the city never was more feebly threatened. It is true that Grant is within a few miles of our capital, when, this time last year, he was on the Rapidan. But that is a fool's measure of danger; for in each case we have the same army shielding Richmond, and whether that shield is broken ten or a hundred miles away is of no importance to the interest it covers. Again, Grant had on the Rapidan the finest army the enemy had ever put in the field. He has now on the lines around Richmond the poorest army that has ever been assembled under the Yankee flag; and the last dregs of the recruiting offices have been sifted out to make it.

Is there anything really desperate in our situation; unless to fools and cowards who draw lines on paper to show how the Yankees are at this place and at that place, and think that this cob-web occupation of the country, where the enemy has no garrisons and no footholds, indicates the extent of Yankee conquest and gives the true measure of the remnant of the Confederacy! And yet this is too much the popular fashion of the time in estimating the military situation. Men are drawing for themselves pictures of despair out of what are to those who think profoundly and bravely no more important than the passages of the hour---

Light and shade
Upon a waving field, chasing each other.

I am determined to express the truth, no matter how painful to myself or unwelcome to others. In the first period of this war who was not proud of the

Confederacy and its heroic figure in history! Yet now it is to be confessed that a large portion of our people have fallen below the standards of history, and hold no honourable comparison with other nations that have fought and struggled for independence. It is easy for the tongue of the demagogue to trip with flattery on the theme of the war; but when we come to the counsels of the intelligent the truth must be told. We are no longer responding to the lessons and aspirations of history. You speak of the scarcity of subsistence. But Prussia, in her wars, drained her supplies until black bread was the only thing eat in the king's palace; and yet, under Frederick, she won not only her independence, but a position among the Five Great Powers of Europe. You speak of the scarcity of men. Yet with a force not greater than that with which we have only to hold an invaded country and maintain the defensive, Napoleon fought his splendid career, and completed a circle of victories that touched the boundaries of Europe.

It is enough to sicken the heart with shame and vexation that now, when, of all times, it is most important to convince the enemy of our resolution—now, when such a course, for peculiar reasons, will insure our success—there are men who not only whine on the streets about making terms with the enemy, but intrude their cowardice into the official places of the Government, and sheltered by secret sessions and confidential conversations, roll the word “reconstruction” under the tongue. Shame upon the Congress that closed its doors that it might better consult of dishonourable things! Shame upon those leaders who should encourage the people and yet have broken down their confidence by private conversations, and who, while putting in newspapers some cheap words of patriotism, yet in the same breath suggest their despair by a suspicious cant about trusting in Providence, and go off to talk submission with their intimates in a corner! Shame upon those of the people who have now no other feeling in the war than an exasperated selfishness; who are ready to sink, if they can carry down in their hands some little trash of *property*; who will give their sons to the army, but not their precious negro slaves; who are for hurrying off embassies to the enemy to know at what price of dishonour they may purchase some paltry remnant of their possessions! Do these men ever think of the retributions of history?

When Cato the Younger was pursued to Utica by the victorious arms of Cæsar, Plutarch relates of him on this occasion certain conversations and sentiments which singularly apply to our own condition in a besieged city, and may almost be taken as repeated in the streets of Richmond:

"One of the Council," writes Plutarch, "observed the expediency of a decree for enfranchising the slaves, and many commended the motion. Cato, however, said: 'He would not do that, because it was neither just nor lawful; but such as their masters would voluntarily discharge, he would receive, provided they were of proper age to bear arms.' This many promised to do; and Cato withdrew, after having ordered lists to be made out of all that should offer. * * * All of the patrician order with great readiness enfranchised and armed their slaves; but as for the three hundred, who dealt in traffic and loans of money at high interest, and whose slaves were a considerable part of their fortune, the impression which Cato's speech had made upon them did not last long. As some bodies readily receive heat, and as easily grow cold again when the fire is removed, so the sight of Cato warmed and liberalized these traders; but when they came to consider the matter among themselves, the dread of Cæsar soon put to flight their reverence for Cato and for virtue. For thus they talked: 'What are we, and what is the man whose orders we refuse to receive? Is it not Cæsar, into whose hands the whole power of the Roman empire is fallen? And surely none of us is a Scipio, a Pompey, or a Cato. Shall we, at a time when their fears make all men entertain sentiments beneath their dignity—shall we, in Utica, fight for the liberty of Rome with a man against whom Cato and Pompey the Great durst not make a stand in Italy? Shall we enfranchise our slaves to oppose Cæsar, who have no more liberty ourselves than that conqueror is pleased to leave us? Ah! wretches that we are! Let us at last know ourselves, and send deputies to intercede with him for mercy.' * * *

* They told Cato that they had resolved to send deputies to Cæsar to intercede first and principally for him. If that request should not be granted, they would have no obligation to him for any favour to themselves, but as long as they had breath would fight for Cato. Cato made his acknowledgments for their regard, and advised them to send immediately to intercede for themselves. 'For me,' said he, 'intercede not. It is for the conquered to turn suppliants, and for those who have done an injury to beg pardon. For my part, I have been unconquered through life, and superiour in the things I wished to be; for in justice and honour I am Cæsar's superiour.'

The arguments of the traders and time-servers in Utica are not unknown in Richmond. But shall we not also find in this city something of the aspiration of Cato—a determination, even if we are overcome by force, to be unconquered in spirit, and, in any and all events, to remain superiour to the enemy—in honour.

I do not speak to you, my countrymen, idle sentimentalism. I firmly believe that the great Commonwealth of Virginia, and this city, which has a peculiar title to whatever there is of good and illustrious report in this war, have been recently, and are yet in some measure on the verge of questions which involve an interest immeasurably greater than has yet been disclosed in this contest—that of their historical and immortal honour.

I know—I have had opportunities of informing myself—that there are influences at work to place, the State of Virginia, in certain contingencies, in communication with the public enemy, for terms of peace, which cannot be otherwise than coupled with the condition of her submission to the Federal authority. The extent of this conspiracy against the honour of Virginia has been screened by secret sessions, and been covered up by half-mouthed suggestions, and the *ifs* and *ands* of men who are not yet ready to disclose their cor-

ruption and to spit from their lips the rottenness in their hearts. I know the fashionable arguments of these men. "If there is to be a wreck," say they, "why not save what we can from it?" "Honour," they say, "is a mere rhetorical laurel;" "Gen. Lee talks like a school-girl when he speaks of preferring to die on the battle-field to getting the best terms of submission he can;" "let us be done with this sentimental rubbish, and look to the care of our substantial interests."

My friends, this is not rubbish! The glory of History is indifferent to events: it is simply Honour. The name of Virginia in this war is historically and absolutely more important to us than any other element of the contest; and the coarse time-server who would sell an immortal title of honour as a trifling sentimentalism, and who has constantly in his mouth the phrase of "substantial interests," is the inglorious wretch who laughs at history and grovels in the calculations of the brute.

Those who have lived entirely in the South since the commencement of this war have little idea of the measure of honour which Virginia has obtained in it, and the consideration she has secured in the eyes of the world. One away from home finds even in intercourse with our enemies, that the name of Virginian is an ornament to him, and that the story of this her heroic capital—the record of Richmond—is universally accepted in two hemispheres as the most illustrious episode of the war. Honour such as this is not a piece of rhetoric or a figure of speech; it is something to be cherished under all circumstances, and to be preserved in all events.

It is scarcely necessary to say that I regard subjugation but as the vapour of our fears. But if remote possibilities are to be regarded. I have simply to say, that in all events and extremities, all chances and catastrophes, I am for Virginia going down to history, proudly and starkly, with the title of a subjugated people—a title not inseparable from true glory, and which has often claimed the admiration of the world—rather than as a people who ever submitted, and bartered their honour for the mercy of an enemy—in our case a mercy whose *pittance* would be as a mess of pottage weighed against an immortal patrimony!

The issue I would put before you is: No Submission; No State Negotiations with the Enemy; No Conventions for such objects, however proper for others. Let Virginia stand or fall by the fortunes of the Confederate arms, with her spotless honour in her hands.

If Virginia accepts the virtuous and noble alternative, she saves, in all events, her honour, and by the resolution which it implies, may hope to secure a positive and glorious victory; and I, among the humblest of her citizens, will be proud to associate myself with a fate which, if not happy, at least can never be ignoble. But, if she chooses to submit, and make terms for Yankee clemency, the satisfaction will at least remain to me of not sharing in the dishonour of my native State, and of going to other parts of the world, where I may say: "I, too, was a Virginian, but not of those who sold the jewels of her history for the baubles and cheats of her conquerors."

EDWARD. A. POLLARD.

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